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SUBJECT: PM MALIKI ON THE ELECTION LAW, INVESTMENT CONFERENCE AND THE MEK

REF: BAGHDAD 2731

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher H. Hill for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. In an October 9 meeting with the Ambassador, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki asked the Ambassador to help stave off efforts in the COR to remove the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) Chairman for fear it could dissolve the entire organization and possibly lead to a delay of national elections. Maliki stated that he would appeal to Ayatollah Sistani to issue a statement supporting an on-time election. The PM also said his attendance at the upcoming Investment Conference depends on COR passage in the coming days of an amendment to the investment law. The PM expressed optimism that an agreement would be signed with ExxonMobil for the West Qurna field soon. Maliki agreed to postpone any effort to relocate the MEK to allow the USG and UNAMI to put together a plan for resettlement of eligible camp residents outside Iraq. The PM urged the Ambassador to support Iraq's rights to water on his upcoming trip to Basra, which has been hard hit by a water crisis. Regarding the reconciliation initiative on the Nineva Provincial Council, the PM said he hoped these would be successful. END SUMMARY.

IHEC and the Election Law

¶2. (C) PM Maliki expressed his dismay about some political parties pressing to remove the IHEC Chairman Faraj al-Haydari. Maliki warned that removal of Haydari at this time could lead to dissolution of the whole commission and possible delays in the January election timetable. He cautioned that any election delay could leave Iraq stuck with a caretaker government, leaving it open to meddling from malicious groups. Maliki said he preferred to address IHEC's shortcomings -- or any disciplinary action against its members -- after the national elections. Maliki said he has asked UNAMI to issue a statement to the effect that the removal of the IHEC Chair would cause a delay the elections. (Note: The statement was released October 11. End Note.) Maliki said he would urge Ayatollah Sistani to issue a statement calling for national elections to be held on time.

¶3. (C) Maliki judged that the Kurds would oppose any motion against IHEC. He added that members of ISCI (Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq) were behind the push for al-Haydari's removal. However, according to Maliki, ISCI/Badr faction leader Hadi

al-Amiri does not support this effort. (Note: Hadi al-Amiri is known to have a tense relationship with new ISCI head Ammar al-Hakim. End Note.) Maliki related that Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) members predict that a move against IHEC will lead to its dissolution. He urged the Ambassador to speak with IIP and ISCI to ensure they will not force this IHEC issue and use it to delay the elections.

¶4. (C) Turning to the mechanics of passing an election law, Maliki said he discussed with all the party bloc leaders the need to amend the 2005 law to allow for open lists. In addition, Maliki expressed the hope that, when the bill comes up for a vote, the COR would use its open electronic voting system; he cautioned that an anonymous vote could tempt lawmakers to push through a closed list system (which he added could in turn lead to better job security for themselves) as well as dissolution of IHEC.

Investment Conference
QInvestment Conference

¶5. (C) The Ambassador informed the PM that over 250 U.S. companies will attend the upcoming U.S.-Iraq Investment Conference in Washington, including top oil companies. In this context, Maliki predicted that an agreement between ExxonMobil and the GOI could be signed soon. Maliki expressed concern, however, about the COR's plans to question Minister of Oil Hussein Shahristani about the oil process.

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Maliki reported that Deputy Speaker Khalid Attiyah and Speaker Ayad Sammarraie promised a COR vote on the investment law amendment on October 13. The PM added that if the amendment passed, he would attend the conference and said he hoped the President and Vice President could take part, even if only symbolically.

MEK -- Action Delayed

¶6. (C) Turning to the MEK issue, the Ambassador pressed Maliki to exercise restraint and to allow the international community to devise possible solutions to the problem. Maliki agreed to delay action for two months to allow the UN and others to get engaged in finding a solution. The PM acknowledged that this is the first time in six years that there has been a concerted effort on the MEK and thanked the Ambassador for the United States' attention to this issue and for securing UN involvement. Maliki cautioned, however, that after the two months pass, the GOI will proceed with its plans to dismantle Ashraf and relocate its residents.

Ninewa Reconciliation Efforts

¶7. (C) On Arab-Kurd tensions, PM Maliki said he supports ongoing efforts at reconciliation but expressed disappointment that Deputy Prime Minister Rafi al-Issawi's efforts in Ninewa have yielded very modest results. Maliki charged that Governor Atheel al-Nujaifi is "pushing on the north wall of the Kurds." He said he supports a temporary solution of Iraqi Army (IA) and Peshmerga under the Ninewa Operations Command (NOC) with U.S. forces playing an oversight or monitoring role. (Note: There are no joint security checkpoints at this time. Exploratory discussion are ongoing. End Note)

Maliki said it was shortsighted of the Sunnis and Turkomen to reject the security plans for Mosul and Kirkuk.

He also

reported that he recently saw a delegation of Mosul sheikhs who were against replacing Peshmerga in their areas with other forces. Maliki said he is unclear as to why the relationship between Sheikh Abdullah and Atheel al-Nujaifi has been so difficult, but added he believes that Sheikh Abdullah has "all the power." The PM was not willing to get between the two. "Let them work it out amongst themselves," he said. (Comment: Maliki's downbeat assessment contradicts what we have heard directly from interlocutors (al-Nujaifi and Sinjari) about the utility and success to date of Issawi's mediation efforts (reftel). It is not clear whether Maliki's information about the status of the mediation is different, or whether he is perhaps casting Issawi's efforts in a more negative light for political purposes. End Comment.)

Kirkuk and "Ninewa Wall"

¶8. (C) With respect to Kirkuk and the Sunnis' demand for the withdrawal of Kurdish intelligence forces, the Assayesh, Maliki acknowledged that the Assayesh are a source of tension and that there should not be two security organizations operating in the same area. As for the recent law enforcement sweep in Mosul ("Ninewa Wall"), Maliki insisted that the operation was very precise and symbolized Iraq's effort to fight AQI and Ba'ath party elements. He added, "Syria finds angry Ba'ath parties in Mosul to exploit." In response to the Ambassador's comment that many of the detainees netted in the operation have already been released, the PM said only that sometimes the evidence does not pan out. Qsometimes the evidence does not pan out.

Ambassador's Trip to Basra

¶9. (C) Maliki said he hoped that the Ambassador could make public statements in support of Iraq's rights to water during the Ambassador's upcoming trip to Basra. The PM said that the Minister of Municipalities will travel to California to seek expert technical assistance from U.S. scientists.

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Maliki said he is hopeful that GOI will explore Sammara and territories near Saudi Arabia for underground water and added that there may also be water deposits under Mosul. Maliki blamed the COR for rejecting an allocation of funds needed to investigate alternative water sources. He commented that the current irrigation systems waste water and Iraq needs foreign expertise on how to use it wisely.

HILL